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UNFINISHED DIALOGUE

The malicious charges of self-glorification levelled against Marshal G. K. Zhukov are entirely groundless on the basis of evidence available in published Soviet sources, although there can be no doubt that the Marshal sought to apply some correctives to the Stalinist distortions of the history of World War II. In his first public statement after promotion to the post of Minister of Defense in February 1955 Zhukov described his role in World War II as follows:

"By a decision of the Defense Committee I was named commander of the troops in the period of the defense of Moscow. In the battle of Stalingrad I directed all the preparatory work for the Stalingrad operation. The operation itself was carried out by Marshal Vasilevsky. I was busy at the time preparing subsequent offensive operations designed to deny Hitler the opportunity to maneuver his forces." (Pravda, 13 February 1955.)

Only two months later, Zhukov made his final claim for special recognition in World War II. This time the use of the first person singular was merely a statement of fact, but by association with General Eisenhower it implied his own leading role. In a message to the Overseas Press Club, Zhukov wrote:

"I take this opportunity to convey my good wishes to President Eisenhower, my colleague in the defeat of Fascist Germany and in the Control Council in Berlin." (New York Times, 20 April 1955.)

By the tenth anniversary of the victory in World War II, however, Zhukov's efforts to ensure for himself a fitting niche in the wartime annals had been completely stopped. Although referred to by Grotewohl in Berlin as the "great commander and liberator of Berlin" (Pravda, 8 May 1955), Zhukov himself attributed the direction of the decisive battles to the anonymous collectivity of military leaders:

"The victories of the Soviet Army near Moscow, at Stalingrad and Kursk, the crushing blows struck at the enemy in 1944 and the strategic operations in 1945 ending the war--these constitute the classics of the military art of the Second World War, the pride of our armed forces and at the same time they are a testimonial to the fighting strength, to the outstanding skill of the Soviet military leaders educated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." (Pravda, 8 May 1955.)

On the same day, Marshal I. S. Konev, delivering the anniversary speech at the Bolshoi Theatre gave priority of place to "Comrades Khrushchev and Bulganin" and the other political commissar, mentioned the State Defense Committee and Stalin second, and then provided a preview of his present rejection of Zhukov's personal role as architect of victory:

"The operations of the Soviet Army were of a creative character, did not resemble one another, they followed from the concrete situation at the front and were conducted on a sweeping scale and with great resolution.

"An important part in preparing the operations, in leading and guiding the troops was assigned to the army groups and armies.

"The commanders of these groups and armies were the direct organizers of the operations for routing the main groups of the enemy forces."

(Pravda, 9 May 1955.)

Although press recognition was apparently then denied Zhukov through Khrushchev's control of Agit-Prop, the First Secretary in his secret speech at the XX Party Congress presented himself as the defender of Zhukov against Stalin's spiteful comments belittling Zhukov's talents (see below, p. 1). In December of the same year, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, unusual publicity for Marshal Zhukov, a candidate member of the Presidium, was summarized by Harrison Salisbury as follows:

"On December 2 a two-column picture was published on page one of Pravda with the text of decrees honoring him on his birthday and awarding him the Order of Lenin. (See below, p. 1.)

"The birthday tribute was not unusual, but it was immediately followed by publicity connected with Marshal Zhukov's role in saving Moscow from Nazi attack just fifteen years ago. The anniversary of the offensive, which relieved the threat of German capture of Moscow, was marked in a manner not used for the anniversary of other Soviet victories in World War II.

"For four days all Soviet newspapers led by Pravda, Izvestia, and the Soviet Army newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda, were filled with articles and tributes to Marshal Zhukov, describing in great detail how he had mounted the offensive and rolled the Germans back." (New York Times, 23 December 1956.)

These awards, including "an unprecedented fourth Order of Lenin and a fourth Gold Star as Hero of the Soviet Union" (B. J. Cutler, New York Herald Tribune, 3 December 1956) made Zhukov the "most decorated figure" in Soviet history, surpassing even Stalin's accumulation" (ibid.).



Shortly before the June Plenum where Zhukov's intervention is attested to have "saved" Khrushchev (see Deutschland Sender, 3 November 1957 for first Communist confirmation that Zhukov ordered military aircraft to transport Central Committee members to the plenary session), the First Secretary made an unintentional slip of the tongue in replying to a question concerning the strength of the Soviet armed forces:

"I did not ask my minister,\* our Minister of Defense about that and I don't know any accurate figures..." (New York Times, 3 June 1957; \*omitted in Pravda text, 4 June 1957.)

On the very eve of the fateful plenum Pravda published another in the series of Khrushchev interviews. For the benefit of the editor in chief of the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun and, perhaps, for the edification of Soviet readers, Khrushchev recalled Zhukov's part in the Mongolian campaign:

"...Japan attacked the Mongolian People's Republic, and the Soviet Union, in fulfillment of its treaty obligations, had to come to its assistance. There was fighting near Khalkhin Gol. The Soviet troops were then commanded by Zhukov, who is today Minister of Defense of the Soviet Union. How many sacrifices both we and the Japanese had to make in that war!" (Pravda, 18 June 1957.)

Details of Zhukov's performance in this campaign had already been published in an article on the battle of Khalkhin Gol in Volume 46 of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (passed for publication February 1957; in Volume 16, sent to press late 1952, Zhukov's biography states merely that he had "participated" in the defeat of the Japanese.) In the August issue of Voprosy Istorii, No. 8, 1957 (passed for publication, 31 August 1957) a twenty-page article on this battle gave Zhukov his rightful place as commander of the Soviet forces.

Taking advantage of his position after the expulsion of the anti-Party group, Zhukov almost immediately presented his bill for recognition in the famous Leningrad speech (Pravda, 16 July 1957) with a reminder of his role "as commander of the troops on the Leningrad front in the autumn of 1941, at the most critical period." In this address, containing the accusations against Malenkov, Molotov and Kaganovich for preventing the investigation of violations of socialist legality, Zhukov also paid personal tribute to the agricultural program "put forward by the Central Committee on the initiative of Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev." The First Secretary, almost immediately after his return from a six week's vacation, again exploited the name and prestige of the popular Marshal in an interview, this time with James Reston:

"At one of his news conferences President Eisenhower in reply to a question from one of the correspondents about a possible meeting between Marshal (Georgi K.) Zhukov and the United States Defense Secretary said that he saw no grounds for saying that such a meeting would not be useful. We believed what President Eisenhower said. With an eye to the position held by Mr. Eisenhower and Marshal Zhukov and regarding the President's words an expressing a wish to improve relations between our countries we considered that Marshal Zhukov could have visited the United States. With this purpose our Ambassador in the United States was instructed to call on Mr. Dulles and find out how the President's statement was to be understood.

"Dulles told our Ambassador that Eisenhower's words had simply been misunderstood in the Soviet Union and that President Eisenhower had not implied any concrete proposals. This produced an unfavorable impression. We take pride in our state and our people and we are not soliciting invitations anywhere. Naturally we are not pleased when a desire is expressed for a meeting and the door is then shut. Responsible statesmen should act in keeping with their words." (New York Times, 10 October 1957.)

At this date Marshal Zhukov was just beginning his state visit to Yugoslavia, unexpectedly extended to include Albania; upon his return he was removed as Minister of Defense (Pravda, 26 October 1957) and expelled from the Presidium and Central Committee (Pravda, 3 November 1957). In between those two dates N. S. Khrushchev made his last known public remarks:

"I saw Zhukov today. I spoke to him. He was in good health. We have not yet decided on a job for him, but he will have one in keeping with his experience and qualifications." (UP, 20 October 1957 at Turkish reception.)

The Central Committee has now entrusted this task to the Secretariat (Pravda, 3 November 1957). In executing this task, Khrushchev will, no doubt, be guided by the simple philosophy expressed in the same conversation:

"In life one cell is born, another cell must die, but life goes on." Even for the most "vulgar Marxist," however, this life process is one of constant struggle, not quiet succession. The words of the First Secretary, from the secret speech in February 1956 to the Reston interview in October 1957, have concealed an inherent contradiction of the mono-Party State which has now been resolved as though it were "non-antagonistic." In the next phase of the struggle--no matter how long postponed--Khrushchev's semantics may not be sufficient to prevent the transformation of these "harmless" differences which can be resolved by persuasion into antagonistic contradiction which require the application of force.



### Khrushchev on Zhukov

Secret Speech,  
XX Party Congress,  
25 February 1956

Stalin was very much interested in the assessment of Comrade Zhukov as a military leader. He asked me often for my opinion of Zhukov. I told him then, "I have known Zhukov for a long time; he is a good general and a good military leader."

After the war Stalin began to tell all kinds of nonsense about Zhukov, among other things the following, "You praised Zhukov, but he does not deserve it. It is said that before each operation at the front Zhukov used to behave as follows, He used to take a handful of earth, smell it and say, 'We can begin the attack,' or the opposite, 'That planned operation cannot be carried out.'" I stated at that time, "Comrade Stalin, I do not know who invented this, but it is not true."

It is possible that Stalin himself invented these things for the purpose of minimizing the role and military talents of Marshal Zhukov.

### The Central Committee on Zhukov

Pravda and Izvestia  
Dec. 2, 1956

To comrade Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov:

The Party Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers, ardently greet you, outstanding general, prominent figure of the Communist Party and the Soviet state on your 60th birthday.

The Communist Party and the Soviet people highly value your services in the building up of the armed forces and in the defense of the socialist fatherland. In the difficult years of the great patriotic war you boldly and courageously led the Soviet forces in the decisive battles for the freedom and independence of our homeland. In the years of peaceful labor you steadily devoted your efforts and knowledge to the further construction of the Soviet state and to the cause for strengthening the defensive capability of our country.

We heartily wish you, dear Georgy Konstantinovich, our friend and comrade, good health and many years of life and further fruitful activity for the benefit of the Soviet people, in the name of the triumph of Communism.

Party Central Committee      USSR Council of Ministers